

A cuppa...in three seconds!

NEED a quick caffeine fix? There are lots of new gadgets that can make you a cuppa in seconds.

The Stellar quick boil glass kettle (£54.99, fishpools.co.uk) is powered by a 3,000-watt element.

It can make just one cup at a time — as can the Tefal Quick Cup (£84.99, amazon.com, pictured), which produces a brew in just three seconds — though it may not be hot enough for some people.

A boiling cuppa, on the other hand, takes 40 seconds with the Breville Hot Cup (£49.50, johnlewis.com).

Another speedy alternative to the conventional kettle is the

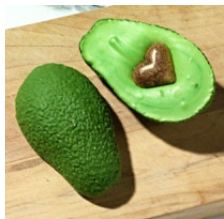


Quooker hot water tap system, which dispenses boiling water on demand. But it's certainly not cheap: prices start at £850 (quooker.co.uk).

Of course, you could also use a trusty saucepan.

Lakeland has a new range of Flare kitchen pans that use 40 per cent less energy to heat up water than a conventional pan (from £49.99, lakeland.co.uk).

Tempted by a choccie-cado?



LOOKS like just the thing for a healthy lunch, doesn't it? But don't be fooled — this avocado is made of solid chocolate.

The perfect naughty treat for the healthy eaters in your life, the 'fruit' is made from white Belgian chocolate and has a caramel filled, heart-shaped stone. Handmade to look just like the real thing, it's shaped and coloured at Choconchoc's kitchens in Somerset and costs £12 (choconchoc.co.uk).

YOU Beauty Box The Cult Beauty Edit

Join YOU Beauty Box and choose any two products from our monthly shortlist, for just £6.95 per month — we'll even throw in our pick of free treats too! This month is packed full of amazing brands including: **L'Occitane**, **Rodial** and **SHOW Beauty**. Be the first to hear about Limited Edition boxes, as well as the latest beauty news. What's not to love?

Pick
2 products
from our
May
shortlist



Our May shortlist

1 Popband Popband Hair Band* (sample size) 2 Rodial Stem Cell Cleansing Cream (70ml) 3 NUXE Huile Prodigieuse® (10ml) 4 L'Occitane en Provence Thé Vert & Bigarade Eau de Toilette (7.5ml) 5 Revlon Ultra HD™ Lipstick in Hibiscus (3g) 6 Verso Super Facial Serum (1ml) 7 Burt's Bees Tinted Lip Balm in Hibiscus (4.25g) 8 Anne Semonin Eye Express Radiance Ice Cube (4ml) 9 SHOW Beauty Pure Treatment Oil (60ml) 10 MUA Prime & Conceal Palette (4g) *Each member will receive Popband and Verso products as well as an Anne Semonin £15 gift card.

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LIKE many idealistic mothers-to-be, Layla Woollard viewed a home birth as the perfect way to bring her baby into the world.

Her son would be born in the comfort of a familiar environment, she imagined, and after supervising his calm, joyous — and most importantly, safe — arrival, the professionals in charge would leave Layla and her husband John alone to bask in the marvel of the life they had created.

Unfortunately, things didn't work out like that. The two midwives caring for Layla at her home in Hull, Yorkshire, had already worked a day shift before arriving to monitor her labour at 5pm.

By law they were not allowed to work throughout the night, they explained, as it would contravene health and safety regulations. And with no other midwives available in the entire city, if Layla wanted to give birth at home, she had better get on with it.

Suddenly, all images of the cosy and blissful home birth melted away, as Layla was dispatched immediately to march up and down the stairs to hasten her contractions. Her waters were then artificially — and painfully — broken to speed up the labour.

As the clock ticked into the night, and with no back-up midwives or baby in sight, they advised Layla to start pushing, although she knew her body wasn't ready. Finally, at 2am, when none of their strategies had worked, and an exhausted Layla was in tears, the midwives called an ambulance to take her to hospital, as they had to end their shift.

At Hull Royal Infirmary maternity ward it emerged the premature pushing had slowed Layla's labour, leaving her cervix badly swollen and her unborn baby distressed. It was five more hours before baby Miles was delivered in August 2014.

'I was made to feel like a nuisance and put under pressure,' says Layla. 'The experience was incredibly distressing.'

Yet if new NHS plans go ahead, stories like these could become all too familiar.

The Government is expected to launch pilot schemes in four health trusts in England by 2017, involving thousands of pregnant women where each one is given a £3,000 'maternity care budget' per pregnancy she can spend on personal midwives, independent birthing centres or home births, if she sees fit.

The proposal was suggested earlier this year in an independent National Maternity Review commissioned by NHS England, where it was argued that women would be given more choice and control over how they give birth.

While the NHS insists this is not a policy to encourage home births, women could, it was said, use the money to pay for their own one-to-one midwife to enable them to have a home birth.

Others could put it towards having their babies delivered in a private suite at a midwife-led centre where they might be able to have hypnotherapy, aromatherapy and acupuncture.

THIS seems to be in keeping with a drive towards more 'natural' birthing in the UK: although around 90 per cent of babies are born in hospitals, research suggests that 75 per cent of women would rather have their babies at home or in a midwife-led birthing centre.

But campaigners fear a more cynical reason behind the proposals: Women will be pressured into having babies at home or in less-costly birthing centres to save money. One study found the average cost for a home birth is £1,066, and £1,631 for a hospital birth.

They also fear that these increasing numbers of women who opt for a home birth could find themselves — like Layla — faced with a system wholly incapable of supporting them.

There are three causes of the current overload: a rise in the numbers of older and obese mothers, who tend to have more complex births, and immigration, piling pressure on already stretched NHS maternity services.

One quarter of Britain's babies are now born to foreign mothers, and in 2014 one in 14 women giving birth in Britain were temporary migrants or visitors.

Parenting expert and former

midwife Clare Byam-Cook believes British women with low-risk births frequently find themselves sidelined.

'Immigration is a huge problem and a lot of these women don't speak English, which means it takes much longer to look after new mothers,' she says. 'When our hospitals are overcrowded, someone is going to have to suffer and it feels like ordinary British mothers are forced to carry the can.'

Officials expect the personalised budgets to be available to all women by 2018/19, yet four out of ten maternity wards were closed at some point last year due to staff shortages, and only skeletal staff levels of community midwives remain for home births.

Quite simply, if more women are encouraged to give birth at home under the new care budget system, the midwives may not be there to help them — with possibly disastrous consequences.

Alison Edwards, senior lecturer in midwifery at Birmingham City University, explains: 'After the medical profession took over childbearing in the Fifties, resources were shunted to hospitals where the care was given.'

'If women are to start having more home births — the current figure stands at 2 to 4 per cent — we need a massive cultural shift back, and that will take time.'

The Review hopes to encourage more independent midwives into work. But a change in the law in October 2013 banning healthcare professionals from practising without costly and prohibitive indemnity insurance won't help.

'Independent midwives now have to cover their own phenomenally expensive costs — so a lot

Emergencies: Layla Woollard, top, with Miles, and Lindsey Fish, with Molly, both had to go to hospital

by Antonia Hoyle

have stopped working and there weren't many in the first place,' says Alison Edwards.

Layla, 27, a secretary for her husband John's signage company, seemed a perfect candidate for a home birth. Research has found that for second-time mothers like her, a home birth is just as safe as one in hospital.

She'd given birth to her eldest son, Lennon, seven years ago at an independent, midwife-led birthing centre — which has since closed from lack of funding.

'As my first birth had been straightforward I assumed the second one would be, too,' she says. Layla's GP agreed and referred her to a community midwife, responsible for pre and post-natal care as well as home births.

The midwife advised her there were only two on-call midwives in Hull — whose population is 256,000 — 'but they didn't seem to think it would be an issue,' says Layla.

SHE hired a birthing pool, and when her contractions started in the morning, she waited five hours until they were regular before calling the midwives.

They arrived two hours later, at 5pm. But her cervix was still only 3cm dilated — it needs to be 10cm before a baby can be delivered.

'The midwives said they'd been working all day so wouldn't be able to stay long,' says Layla. 'As hours passed, I started to feel under pressure. It wasn't exactly the relaxing experience I'd envisaged.'

At 10pm she agreed that the increasingly impatient midwives — who had been working 13 hours without a break — could burst her waters with long, knitting needle-like devices. 'It was incredibly painful but they said it might speed up labour, Layla recalls. 'Afterwards they suggested I start pushing. I knew I wasn't ready, but was so focused I did as they said.'

Utterly defeated and exhausted, at 2am Layla left her mother in



Pictures: HULL NEWS & PICTURES / JULIETTE NEEL / BILL MORTON

The NHS wants more women to give birth at home. But here, from one mum deserted by the midwife halfway through to another left in agony, we reveal the...

Harrowing truth about home births



Relieved: Leanne Shrubbs's daughter Eden was delivered by her partner

charge of her elder son while she and John went to hospital. 'I was still only 5cm dilated, my labour had slowed from stress, and I was told if my baby's heart beat dipped any lower I might need a caesarean,' says Layla.

She gave birth at 7am, aided by a pethidine drip for pain relief.

The experience has left Layla, who's eight months' pregnant with her third child, convinced hospital births are now the only safe option.

'I'd be too anxious to give birth anywhere else now. I'd be incredibly nervous about recommending a home birth to anyone,' she says. 'Without more community midwives available, the support is just not available.'

Clare Byam-Cook agrees: 'I would never recommend a home birth. Women who have had one successfully become almost evangelical, but a mother could haemorrhage, the cord could be wrapped around the baby's neck or the baby could

have shoulder dystocia — where their shoulder becomes trapped during birth — and need a doctor.'

A spokesman at Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals Trust said: 'Normal practice would see three on-call midwives covering the Hull area. This level of staffing is appropriate for the number of home births supported within Hull and East Riding.'

'We try to work with each pregnant woman to ensure the choices she makes about her birth are respected, however, there may be times when this is not possible in the interests of the safety of mum or baby, or the midwives delivering their care.'

While Layla had two midwives, Leanne Shrubbs, 30, was deserted by hers halfway through her home birth, leaving her husband Richard, 33, to deliver daughter Eden on the living room floor.

'The whole situation could have gone horribly wrong,' says Leanne, from Swindon, Wiltshire. 'I would

have felt unnatural giving birth in a hospital and I'm a great believer that the more relaxed you are the quicker labour progresses, but first-time mothers need to know home births aren't always a bed of roses.'

Leanne's contractions started early evening in January 2014. A community midwife arrived at 10.30pm with a student midwife in tow.

'Perhaps I underplayed my pain as they didn't seem to think it was worth sticking around and left at midnight when I was 4cm dilated,' says Leanne. 'They told me to call them when my labour had progressed. They didn't say why they were leaving. With hindsight, they should never have gone.'

Within an hour Leanne was having contractions every five minutes. 'I suddenly felt the urge to push and knew the baby was coming,' she recalls. 'Richard called the birthing centre but they said the midwife couldn't get here in time and called the paramedics instead.' Leanne

knelt over her sofa as a paramedic instructed Richard over the phone how to deliver his daughter. 'I was panicked and scared,' says Richard.

Afterwards the couple were shaking with shock. 'I sucked on Eden's nose to remove mucus to clear her airways — something I'd seen on the Internet,' says Leanne.

As she did so the paramedics arrived, followed by the midwife, 20 minutes later, who delivered the placenta and cut the umbilical cord. 'She didn't apologise. If something had gone wrong I would have been furious and complained. But as it is I am just relieved — and adamant we need more midwives on call.'

ASPOKESPERSON for Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust said: 'Ladies who choose to give birth at home are given a phone number for the maternity unit to call any time should they need advice and a midwife will attend when labour begins.'

'On very rare occasions, the midwife may not reach the birth in time for the baby's arrival, and in these cases we also advise contacting the ambulance service to ensure clinical support is on hand.'

Another mother relieved she didn't stick with her plan for a natural birth is Lindsey Fish, 32, from Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. She'd wanted a hypnobirth at an independent birthing centre for her daughter Molly, now two.

'In my mind I would be surrounded by aromatherapy oils

and dim lighting, breathing deeply with no medical intervention,' she says. 'Friends who had given birth said I was being idealistic but I wanted to avoid the sterile environment of hospital.'

But Lindsey, an events manager, started bleeding at full term at 3am one morning in October 2013. Her partner, Andrew, 36, a marketing manager, rushed her to Watford Hospital where an examination revealed a suspected placenta abruption — in which the placenta prematurely tears away from the wall of the womb, potentially depriving the baby of oxygen.

At 11am Molly's heart beat suddenly dropped dangerously low and doctors said they would have to perform an emergency C-section under general anaesthetic as there wasn't time for local anaesthetic to take effect. 'I was terrified that Molly wouldn't make it,' says Lindsey.

Fortunately, she was delivered with no lasting health complications. 'I came round with her on my chest. I had lost a lot of blood and was too exhausted to do anything except tell her she was beautiful,' says Lindsey.

'But I was overcome with relief that my baby had survived — and dread to think what would have happened had I not been in hospital.'

It is something other pregnant women, when presented with their £3,000 personal birthing budget and the lure of alternative birth plans, might wish to consider.



HOW DOES SHE DO THAT?

PENELOPE CRUZ'S SMOKY EYES

ACTRESS Penelope Cruz, 42, looked stunning at the Bafta nominees party in London last weekend. Has she changed her beauty routine as she's got older?

Apparently yes. She's given up smoking, never goes to bed in her make-up and supplements her healthy eating regime with probiotics, enzymes and vitamins.

According to her make-up artist Pablo Iglesias, she's also switched the dramatic blacks and greys around her eyes for softer dark browns — which are more flattering as we age.

She uses Lancôme's Le Crayon Khol Waterproof in Marron, £18.50, and its Hypnose Star Eyes Palettes, £38.